Researching *with* children and young people

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Overview

⇨ How academics have thought about children and research.

⇨ A continuum of research WITH children and young people.

⇨ Another dimension: Phases of the research process.

⇨ Save the Children's matrix for assessing the scope of children's participation in development projects.

⇨ Would it be useful to apply this idea to assessing CYP's participation in research?

⇨ Questions we could ask ourselves when planning research involving children and young people.

Ways of thinking about children and research

Christensen and Prout (2002) identified four ways of seeing children and childhood in the research literature:

- The child as object;

- The child as subject;

- The child as social actor;

- "… and a nascent approach seeing children as participants and co-researchers".

Kellett (2010) also proposes a fourfold distinction:

- Research *on* children;

- Research *about* children;

- Research *with* children;

- Research *by* children.

(Similar to, but subtly different from, Christensen and Prout).

Kellett sees these four research approaches as products of a historical evolution:

"Instead of research *on* children as we saw in early developmental psychology experiments, or research *about* children in explorations of socially constructed childhoods, or research *with* children in the participatory agendas driven by *Every Child Matters*, came the prospect of research *by* children. Research *by* children goes a step further than children as participants or co-researchers."

(Kellett 2010 – drawing on James, Jenks and Prout 1998)

How children become researchers

Alderson (2008) identified three broad ways in which children become actively involved in research:

1. At school, where doing research projects is now commonly part of the curriculum.

2. In adult-run research projects, where it is increasingly common for them to be offered roles as "co-researchers".

   "Besides providing data in their traditional role as research subjects, increasingly, children help to plan questions, collect, analyse or report evidence, and publicise the findings." (Alderson 2008).

3. In research projects mainly initiated and/or directed by children and young people themselves. This approach does not lend itself to the constraints of academic, university-based research (though there are exceptions), so most of this type of research is facilitated by adults working in the NGO sector.

Academic research and action-focused research

"Young researchers are usually keen to produce findings that will achieve changes in, for example, provision of services, and respect for their rights. They therefore often emphasise the follow-up stages of disseminating and implementing the findings" (Alderson 2008).

Alderson contrasts this with university research which tends to concentrate on collecting and analysing data and writing reports.

She considers a lack of funding for the follow-up work that turns research into social action to be one of the barriers to children's participation in research.

Similarly Shier and colleagues (2014) found that lack of support for the necessary follow-up work was one of the main obstacles to children and young people influencing policy-makers.

The "participation versus rigour" debate

"The research process has inherent within it certain quality demands which some (perhaps many) young people find difficult to meet. The more fully they are involved in research, therefore, the less likely it is that the research will meet those demands adequately" (Dyson and Meagher 2001).

"Challenges to engaging children in data analysis represent considerable barriers to children's participation in research; particularly the resistance from academic institutions, sponsors, policy-makers and professional researchers working in conventional research paradigms to more participatory approaches" (Coad and Evans 2008).

Responses to this:

- Providing adequate training and preparation for child researchers (Kellett 2005).

- Giving children advisory rather than leading roles (Lundy and McEvoy 2012).

- Developing a more effective model for facilitation and the role of facilitator (Shier/CESESMA 2012).

"Children are experts in their own lives"

Are they thus automatically qualified to engage in research related to their daily lives?

But…

"It is equally important to involve children in research that goes beyond childhood", because, "Including children in more general social research… will re-describe children as agents that are even more powerful than they have so far been constructed through research practice".

(Uprichard 2010).

Do we need a new paradigm?

Should we do a more radical re-think, so that:

"In scrutinising taken-for-granted assumptions about children and in exploring ideas about how to negotiate their role in research, questions about rights, constructions of childhood and the ways in which children's involvement in research may result in their politicisation are brought to the fore" (Jones 2004)?

A continuum of research WITH children and young people

CYP as engaged subjects, actively generating data, e.g. joining in focus groups.

CYP as data gatherers, e.g. interviewing other CYP (interview questions set by adult researchers).

CYP engaged in data analysis, reviewing findings, formulating recommendations etc.

◄ LESS ◄ How much decision-making power or control over the research do CYP have? ► MORE ►

(Other modes like research on children or research about children (children as objects or even non-engaged subjects) are now off the spectrum).

CYP as advisors, providing support and guidance to adult researchers from a child perspective (Children's-Rights-Based Research: Lundy and McEvoy).

CYP as co-researchers, collaborating with adult researchers on a research project, start to finish.

CYP as autonomous researchers, designing and carrying out their own research projects (Kellett, Shier)

Another dimension: Phases of the research process as a timeline

Identify a research question: needs analysis, consultation, "diagnóstico".

▼

Develop research design, select (or develop) methodology, draw up a plan (find funding, resources), seek ethical approval. ✱ (2)

▼

Identify and recruit participants, obtain consent. ✱ (1)

▼

Generate data

▼

Data analysis: findings, conclusions, recommendations. ✱ (3)

▼

Dissemination of findings: formal publication, wider publicity, media engagement. ✱ (4)

▼

Advocacy, public mobilisation, campaigning, policy impact, action for social change. ✱ (4)

Save the Children's matrix for assessing the scope of children's participation in development projects

WHEN DO CHILDREN BEGIN TO PARTICIPATE AND AT WHAT LEVELS?				
	Children are not involved	**Consultative**	**Collaborative**	**Child-led**
Finding out what the problems are (situation analysis)		Children are asked to give their views.	Children asked to contribute to the process for finding out what problems they face in life.	Children undertake their own research with other children to identify issues of concern.
Deciding what to do (planning)		Planning takes account of the issues raised by children.	Children are involved in deciding what programmes to prioritise and develop.	Children decide for themselves what issues they want to work on.
Taking action (implementation)		Children are invited to take part in the programme.	Children work with adults to design and implement the programme.	Children organise and manage the programme and have full responsibility for its implementation.
Measuring what happened (monitoring and evaluation)		Children are consulted on whether they think the programme achieved what it planned to do.	Children work with adults to decide how to evaluate the programme.	Children determine what should be evaluated and, with adult support, undertake the evaluation of the programme.
Acting on findings (dissemination and feedback)		Children are invited to make suggestions as to how to respond on the basis of the findings.	Adults involve children in a discussion about the implications of the findings and explore how they should influence future programming.	Children reflect on the findings, and come up with proposals for the implications, which are then shared with adults.
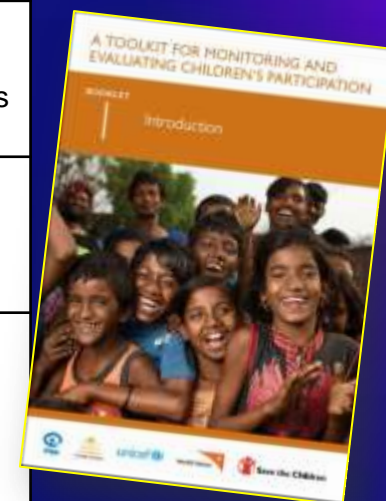
From:
"A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation" (Lansdown and O'Kane 2014).

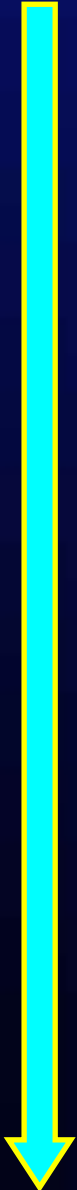Would it be useful to apply this idea to assessing CYP's participation in research?

Continuum of power and influence as a horizontal axis

Timeline of the research process as a vertical axis

	Children are not involved	Consulted	Collaborate with adult researchers	Child-led
Deciding on the research question		CYP asked about problems that concern them.	CYP and adults jointly define research question.	CYP choose their own research question.
Designing the research, choosing methodology		CYP consulted on what research methodology to use.	CYP and adults deliberate and jointly decide on the methodology to use.	CYP decide what methodology they want to use.
Identifying and recruiting participants		CYP asked to advise on recruiting participants.	CYP and adults jointly identify and recruit participants.	CYP identify and recruit research participants.
Collecting the data		Research involves adults interviewing CYP or surveying their opinions.	CYP and adults collaborate on data-gathering activity.	CYP organise and carry out data collection activities.
Analysing the data, drawing conclusions		Adults show preliminary findings to CYP and ask for feedback.	CYP and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions.	CYP analyse data and draw their own conclusions.
Producing a report		Adults consult CYP on aspects of the final report.	CYP and adults work together to produce a report.	CYP produce their own report in their own words.
Dissemination of the report and its findings		Adults consult CYP on how to disseminate findings.	CYP and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities.	CYP undertake activities to disseminate their findings.
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact		Children consulted about possible advocacy actions.	CYP and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation.	CYP develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation.

Questions we could ask ourselves when planning research involving children and young people

1. What is the goal of our research? Is it only to generate academic knowledge (or career advancement), or are we also concerned with impact for social change and/or empowerment of the children and young people involved?

2. Where did the research question come from?

3. Have we thought about engaging with CYP throughout the process, or is it more convenient just to bring them in at a certain stage?

4. Have we considered forming a children's advisory group for this research project?

5. If we were to move along the continuum (i.e. consider increasing the engagement of children and young people in the research process):

    ☐ What would be the methodological and resource implications?

    ☐ What would be the challenges for us as adult researchers?

    ☐ What would be the risks, if any? (Are we under pressure to play safe?)

    ☐ What would be the potential benefits?

    ☐ Are we up for a challenge?

    (We should ask these questions in respect of each phase of the research process, and in answering them we need to take into account the age range and the evolving capacities of the children and young people involved).

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THE END

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